

## BOOK REVIEW

AMY STEWART. 2013. **The Drunken Botanist: The Plants that Create the World's Great Drinks.** (ISBN: 978-1-61620-046-6, paper overboard). Algonquin Books, P.O. Box 2225, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514-2225, U.S.A. (Orders: [www.amystewart.com](http://www.amystewart.com)). \$19.95, 368 pp., 2-color illus., 6" × 8".

Amy Stewart got the idea for this book when she went to a liquor store and saw, in her wonderful imagination, instead of bottles of liquor, the plants that make the drinks we know and love—or don't know and don't love as the case may be. Her vision inspired a great little book for imbibers, botanists, gardeners, chemists, bacteriologists, and historians.

The book is handily sectioned into plants from which we create alcohol, the plants we use to flavor alcohol, and the plants we use to garnish our drinks. Each of these sections is in alphabetical order, making it easy to find something specific. The index is quite detailed and is also helpful for anyone doing research. (The recipes listed in the front of the book save time!)

In Part I, we are introduced to the plants used to make alcohol as well as the plants we use to age the brew. This includes mostly grasses, fruit, and vegetables used to create alcohol. There are only a few oaks currently used to make barrels in which rough spirits are tamed into the smooth scotch, whiskey, rye, rum, gin, & vodka, with which we are familiar.

The history of various beverages is fascinating, and along the way Stewart debunks a myth or two. For instance, vodka was made of grains long before the potato even arrived in Europe. Apparently Russia and Poland still quarrel over who invented the beverage. The history and importance of yeast in the whole process is thoroughly and delightfully covered. Without the yeast, we would have no alcohol. My favorite category of side articles in the book is "Bugs 'n' Booze." Earthworms, honeybees, and whatever falls off the rafters into the fermenting vat can bring yeast, flavor, and color to the mix.

Part II of the book covers the flavors we give to various alcoholic beverages. From allspice to wormwood, angostura to sugar maple, apricot to yuzu, and almonds to walnuts, the reader is led through a garden of flavors. Given her directions, you could grow your own hops or sloes or citrus!

In addition, Ms. Stewart provides quite a few recipes and not a few horticultural tips on which species to select and the prime conditions for growing various plants. There is a recipe for Capillaire syrup which uses several stems of fresh maidenhair fern, water, sugar, and orange flower water. The resulting syrup comes in handy if you wish to create Jerry Thomas Regent's Punch.

Stewart winds up her book with garnishes for various drinks. Herbs, flowers, berries, vines, fruits, and vegetables are touted here. A template for experimental garden cocktails will send you to your garden or the local farmer's market to try some or all of the recipes. You will be encouraged to grow your own berries, fruit and vegetables in a garden made exclusively for cocktails. She makes it sound easy.

*The Drunken Botanist* is a really fun read. Lots of facts are crammed into the book, but Ms Stewart keeps it light and entertaining. It is filled with fun facts for cocktail hour small talk and would make a great gift for anyone who likes cocktails.—Kay Yount, Tarrant County Master Gardener & Volunteer at the Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, Texas, U.S.A.